

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

December 19, 2018

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Senate Democratic Leader
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House of Representatives
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Ryan and Leader Pelosi:

We write to ask you to include key assistance for our nation's miners in end-of-year legislation. Our nation's coal miners have done the heavy lifting for our country and, yet, they continually are burdened with fighting for the health care and retirement benefits they have earned over lifetimes of back-breaking work. We urge you to include an extension of the coal excise tax for the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund, the addition of orphan miners from 2018 bankruptcies into the Coal Act, and a permanent fix to ensure the solvency of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) 1974 Pension Plan.

More than 25,000 coal miners and their dependents rely on the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund to pay for critical medical treatment and basic expenses.¹ These miners dedicated years to working in the coal mines, providing energy for our nation, and are now facing the devastation of coal workers' pneumoconiosis, or black lung disease, caused by inhaling coal mine dust. After their years of service, it is our responsibility to ensure that they have the care and support that they need. Black lung is a devastating disease. One pulmonologist described it as "suffocating while alive."² And it is only getting worse. We are seeing more and more cases of black lung – particularly the worst form of the disease – and we are seeing it in younger and younger miners who have spent less time in the mines. That is why we urge you to extend the coal excise tax at current levels before the end of the year. This important tax, which is set to decrease by 55% without Congressional action, funds the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund. If the tax is not extended, this already indebted Trust Fund could face borrowing costs of more than \$15 billion by 2050.³

Coal company bankruptcies continue to devastate our coal communities, often leaving coal miners without the benefits they were promised. Due to 2018 coal company bankruptcies, there are approximately 1,200 miners and dependents who will be left without health care in the coming months. It is imperative that Congress act to ensure these coal miners' health benefits are protected.

¹ <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/692103.pdf>

² <https://www.npr.org/2018/12/18/675253856/an-epidemic-is-killing-thousands-of-coal-miners-regulators-could-have-stopped-it>

³ <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/692103.pdf>

And, we continue to seek a fix to the UMWA 1974 Pension Plan crisis – this fund was well-managed but, as a result of the 2008 financial crisis and ongoing coal bankruptcies, our nation's retired miners are at risk of losing their hard-earned pension benefits. In the last two years alone contributions have dropped by more than \$100 million, leaving less than \$25 million per year still coming in to the Plan.

And, by no fault of their own, these miners are now at risk of losing the modest pensions they earned. While the average UMWA pension is less than \$600 per month, these benefits are critical to so many miners and their families. We must protect the pensions of these 87,000 current beneficiaries and 20,000 more whose pensions have vested.

If the UMWA 1974 Pension Plan collapses beneficiaries and their dependents will be dropped into the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC), destroying that agency and requiring the American taxpayer to foot the bill. The UMWA 1974 Plan actuaries currently expect the Plan to become insolvent in the 2022-2023 time-frame, however any market downturn will rapidly accelerate insolvency. The time to act is now.

Our nation's coal miners made a commitment to provide our nation with the energy we needed to power our nation to prosperity and they risked their health and lives to do so. Now is not the time to pull back on funding or abandon our miners in their hour of need. It is time for us to keep our full promise to them and ensure their benefits are not lost.

Our miners are the hardest working people in America. We look forward to working with you to ensure all of these benefits are secured and protected for our nation's miners.

Sincerely,



Joe Manchin III
United States Senator

Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Doug Jones
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Matt Cartwright
Member of Congress



Conor Lamb
Member of Congress



Mike Doyle
Member of Congress



Marcia L. Fudge
Members of Congress



Wm. Lacy Clay
Member of Congress



Bennie G. Thompson
Member of Congress



Brenda L. Lawrence
Member of Congress